

**on the
COVER**



Determined anglers try their luck at the Bokeelia Island pier in Southwest Florida

“Story boarding” helps staff work through complex issues and develop action plans

A certified diver prepares to conduct an underwater inspection at Pumping Station S-5A

A Kissimmee Field Station employee insures that a data recorder is functioning properly

District outreach specialists tout water conservation at community festivals

Inside a pumping station, massive diesel engines provide the power to move millions of gallons of water when needed



“We are on a deliberate and accelerated pace to meet federal court and state mandated water quality goals.”

– NICOLÁS GUTIÉRREZ
GOVERNING BOARD CHAIR

Our Everglades Focus Remains Steadfast

***B**old action by the Governor and Legislature to amend the Everglades Forever Act provides the South Florida Water Management District with the tools needed to continue our positive progress toward meeting long-term water quality goals.*

Opinions about how to restore and protect the Everglades are as diverse as the plants and animals that live in this unique ecosystem. Despite the barrage of misinformation and counter-productive attacks during this year’s legislative session, the Governing Board and staff remain steadfast in our commitment and resolve to clean up and protect the Everglades.

In reality, we are on a deliberate and accelerated pace to meet federal court and state mandated water quality goals, as well as to implement our historic partnership with the federal government to revitalize the Everglades ecosystem.

Consider this: Since the Florida legislature passed the Everglades Forever Act in 1994, we have made tremendous strides toward reducing the amount of phosphorus entering the Everglades. The construction of Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs), which use vegetation to naturally cleanse runoff water from the Everglades Agricultural Area, are performing much better than expected. Positive changes in on-farm practices have also greatly exceeded our initial projections.

To date, we have approximately 20,000 acres of STAs in operation. Over the last decade, the

combination of farming best management practices and STAs has cut total phosphorus inputs by more than 1,300 tons! Within the next several months, we plan to double the treatment acreage, and begin operation of two more STAs totaling over 22,000 acres. With that milestone, some 42,000 acres will be actively working to reduce phosphorus! And we are currently already in full compliance with the requirements of the 1992 federal court-ordered settlement agreement.

Even with these successes, however, we know that additional measures must be implemented to meet the proposed phosphorus criterion. Because we are literally breaking new ground on ecosystem restoration of this scale and magnitude, we continue to face many uncertainties.

At our March Governing Board meeting, we endorsed the 10 parts per billion (ppb) phosphorus criterion proposed by the state, while acknowledging that current technology constraints may not allow us to achieve this extremely low value in all discharges by December 2006 throughout the entire Everglades area. This well-balanced position should have come neither as a shock nor as an unexpected revelation to anyone that follows these issues. We have repeatedly stated these uncertainties in progress reports and previous technical documents.

At this same meeting, we also reiterated our commitment to the Everglades by endorsing a conceptual plan designed to implement the most aggressive,

scientifically-defensible measures before December 2006. This plan will also help us ultimately achieve compliance with long-term water quality goals. A key reason for our action was to raise the level of public debate about this important mission responsibility.

That strategy certainly worked! The Everglades phosphorus debate became the issue *du jour* for state, federal and local elected officials, environmental groups, business concerns and even at miscellaneous social gatherings. Unfortunately, it also turned into a self-propelled media feeding frenzy.

You can be assured that our commitment is unwavering and our focus is on reality and science, not rhetoric and politics. We have already expended \$600 million to get us where we are today, and we have endorsed an additional \$450 million plan to help us ultimately reach the proposed phosphorus levels of 10 parts per billion.

This plan allows us to learn from and apply new knowledge and technology as it becomes available. Importantly, it also provides us with the opportunity to save significant taxpayer dollars by reducing overall costs through better coordination of restoration efforts, in order to eliminate the possibility of duplicative or unnecessary projects.

The South Florida Water Management District will continue to aggressively move forward with the task at hand, that is the effective and long-term protection of the Everglades.



Front row from left: **Christian Spence**, **Shane Bennett**, **Gabriella Powell**, **Briley Loftin**, **Ode Akpoji** and **Natalie Brandon**. Back row from left: **Barry Smith**, Director of the Natural Resources Stewardship Division, Palm Beach County; **Henry Dean**, District Executive Director; **Lennart Lindahl**, District Governing Board Member; **Patrick Gleason**, former District Governing Board Member; and **Kevin McCarty**, District Governing Board Member.

Kids Dig in at Groundbreaking

Children joined officials from the District and Palm Beach County on April 24 to break ground and initiate construction of the G-160 structure, or Loxahatchee Slough Spillway, one of the largest such structures in the system. *Take Your Child To Work Day* and *Earth Day* gave the children – future stewards of our water resources – the opportunity to be a part of a project that will benefit the environment now and for generations to come.

This structure, located on the C-18 canal in northern Palm Beach County, will provide essential freshwater flows to the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River during the dry season while maintaining water supply and flood control benefits.



Governing Board member **Irela Bagué** (straw hat) holds a check that helped fund an eight-day kayak tour for young people called “Discovering Biscayne Bay.” Staff from the area Service Center and Citizens for a Better South Florida joined the group.

¿Que Pasa con el Agua? or, What’s Up with Water?

Although Irela Bagué was just recently appointed to the District’s Governing Board in March 2003 by Governor Jeb Bush, her background and long-time interest in water resources meant she could hit the ground running as an advocate for environmental education and community outreach. Bagué has her own public relations firm, and worked as a Public Affairs Coordinator for the Florida Office of the National Audubon Society. She also worked with Miami-Dade County Commissioner Miguel Diaz de la Portilla and, in 1998, was a Government and Public Affairs Representative at the District’s Miami-Dade regional service center.

“My experiences reaching out to the diverse communities of South and Central Florida taught me that in order to be successful I needed to communicate our complex water resource issues in simple terms to effectively raise awareness, build support and educate the people within the District’s 16 counties,” Bagué said.

Bagué is frequently a guest on Spanish as well as English language radio programs. “Radio travels with listeners, and is available in their cars, at work, at home, wherever they might be,” she said. “These public affairs and talk radio programs offer an ideal opportunity for me to share information about critical issues like Everglades restoration and the need for water conservation and flood protection.”

Hispanics are one of the fastest-growing populations in South and Central Florida,

and radio is an integral part of Hispanic culture and lifestyle. While recent census shows that South Florida’s total population grew 21.4% over 10 years, the Hispanic population rose by 47.2%.

The region’s Hispanic population is Cuban-American, as well as Colombian, Nicaraguan, Venezuelan, Argentinean, Honduran, Salvadoran, and from many other Spanish-speaking Latin American and Caribbean countries.

“Many Hispanics speak both English and Spanish, and have made their mark in business and politics using both languages,” said Nicolás Gutiérrez, District Governing Board Chair. Studies have shown that many prefer getting information in their native language. In one survey of radio listeners, 71% of 1,193,500 Hispanics said Spanish is their primary, and/or preferred language.

“Hispanic listeners are very interested in water conservation, and in the work we are doing to restore the Everglades and other conservation efforts throughout South Florida,” Bagué said. “Our younger listeners may grow up to be the engineers or scientists who make a difference.”